

Winter Outing
by Pak Wanso

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11th Grade
ESL Through Humanities or English Language Arts
Time Requirement: Two to Three 60-Minute Class Periods

Lesson Objectives

This lesson will enable students to develop and deepen understanding of contemporary Korean history through a close textual read of the short story, “Winter Outing” by Pak Wansŏ. While exploring author’s intent and storytelling technique, students will simultaneously investigate the complexity, impact and dynamics of the Korean War and post-war period on individuals and society throughout the Korean peninsula. By rewriting the story from alternate perspectives, students will build off of the history they have learned and employ literary techniques and devices learned through the initial study of the story. By using literature to teach history, students will gain insight into historical events making connections and allowing for empathy and the awareness of multiple perspectives and realities.

Summary

With the tragedy of the Korean War and the national division of the country as an ever-present backdrop, “Winter Outing” tells the story of a woman on a physical and emotional journey, allowing for the reader to explore the personal effects of war and its aftermath. After walking in to her husband’s art studio to find him painting a portrait of their daughter with such emotional intensity and their closeness one that all but excludes anyone else, the narrator remembers that the man who is her husband, twenty-five years earlier, fled the North with his baby daughter for the South at the time of division, leaving his parents and wife behind.

Deciding then to leave Seoul to travel for a short solitary mid-winter trip, the woman goes to Onyang to visit the hot springs. Full of mixed emotions wavering between estrangement and jealousy and alone in the cold, the narrator questions the authenticity of her surroundings and her role. Pride, determination and isolation mix together as she then decides to leave the resort after one night, finding herself before traveling back to Seoul in a nearby town on a scenic lake during the off-season. Motivated by the cold, the narrator makes her way to an inn where the warm welcome she is presented with strongly contrasts with the bone-chilling cold and exhaustion that have invaded her.

It is here at the inn that warmth is found not only through food and shelter but also through the sisterly affections of the innkeeper. Welcomed in and given a bed to rest, food to comfort and satiate and familial acceptance, the narrator lingers engaging with the innkeeper and her elderly mother-in-law. This mother-in-law suffers from an unceasing shaking of her head back and forth, right to left, that at first the narrator associates with disapproval to later be informed that it started during the war. It is here that the innkeeper tells the mother-in-law’s story and that of her husband’s, and the danger the family faced and the legacy that has continued to haunt them through the trauma faced. This character, known affectionately as Grandmother No-No, is history personified and traces terror to a place of healing.

The story ends with the narrator and the innkeeper planning to travel to Seoul together. The narrator is returning to her family and its own complicated history and form of resilience. The innkeeper to search for her son who has not been seen at his domicile suggesting new echoes of an ever-changing modernizing world with conflicts while also harkening back to the loss and separation that was endured during the Korean Civil War.

This is a story of loss told simply and with complexity. This is a story of isolation and division told through individuals within families. This is a story of a nation torn apart and not allowed to fully heal as the people populating this story- alive and ghosts- remind and reveal to one another. This is a story of war and the trauma of its aftermath. “Winter Outing” is a story of recovery, its slow-heeled process, and the juxtaposition of modernity and prosperity to that of what remains of a time, place, and events that demand to be reconciled and confronted. The two families of this story provide that allegory for Korea and allow for traversing the layers of a post-war nation.

Historical / Literary Context

In 1993, “Winter Outing” was published along with a collection of other post-1945 Korean short fiction translated into English in an anthology entitled, *Land of Exile: Contemporary Korean Fiction*. Themes and motifs explored in this anthology, as well as in “Winter Outing,” are those of exile, loss, displacement, and the role of women in modern Korea. “Winter Outing” deals head on with the division of Korea after the Korean War and the displacement, estrangement and global awareness Koreans experienced.

“Winter Outing” takes place roughly two decades after the Korean Civil War and the establishment of the Republic of Korea (R.O.K) in the South and in the North, The Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea. Politically divided and abruptly sealed off from one another after a period of flexible openness, the war itself and the aftermath coming directly after Japan’s occupation and colonization as well as China’s influence and strength as a communist power created a country once whole to be painfully torn apart with families separated, and loved ones missing with unanswered questions. While South Korea became a part of a growing globalized world and one whose modernity rose with lightening speed and prosperity, North Korea stays locked in a shroud a mystery and exclusion from the rest of the world.

Pak Wansö, born 1931 in what is now a North Korean village, passed away in 2011, began writing at age 38. She went on to write twenty novels and over a hundred short stories and leaves behind the legacy of being one of Korea’s most influential contemporary literary presences often addressing the experiences of women. During the Korean War, Pak was separated from her own mother and elder brother. Motifs and themes often found in Pak’s writings are those of old age, feminism, and the tragedy of families separated by the Korean War as well as the residual damage. The ongoing effects of the war are shown through the survivors portrayed in her fiction and offer both a critique and humanity to the history. Through focusing her look at the war and its effects on families, Pak is able to engage readers through personal and emotional connections. Her writings, while all fiction some based loosely on stories told to her and personal experiences, becomes a form of testimonials that lend themselves to diving deeper into history and pose questions for what this type of study can do to help enlighten the future. In an interview published in List Magazine, Pak states, “As I experienced so many things I would never have thought humans could do to each other, it seems I was thinking to myself, ‘I must never forget this, I must remember it at all costs.’” She also goes on to state in the same interview, “I think it’s very difficult to understand the literature of a country without having an understanding of its history.” It is through these statements that we see Pak’s commitment to the power of literature and its essential role in teaching and being a part of history.

Discussion Questions / Answers

1. Why does the narrator feel an intense jealousy toward her daughter after discovering them together in the studio? What path of memories does this lead the narrator down?

Upon discovering her husband and daughter together in his studio where he is painting her portrait, the narrator feels an overwhelming and intense jealousy and loathing toward her daughter and exclusive closeness that is surrounding her husband and daughter. Their daughter exudes “a prosperous and elegant beauty” (Pak, “Winter Outing” 153) and reminds the narrator that their daughter is now the exact age of her biological mother at the time her husband left and the war separated them forever. The husband’s decision to paint his daughter’s portrait gives a clue to his loss, what he gave up and what was taken away from him in the war. This encounter, and the narrator’s decision to leave town for a short trip open up a view to the past and the very personal history affecting not only the narrator’s family and circumstances, but those of nearly all Korean families.

2. What role does the innkeeper play in the story? How do her actions and presence influence the narrator?

The innkeeper reestablishes family for the narrator and the uncomplicated warmth and ease that come from these sisterly and familial relationships. It is through this generosity and unfettered relationship that the narrator can heal and reestablish her grounding and footing in her own family. In hearing the story of Grandmother No-No and the tragic circumstances of the innkeeper’s husband’s death, the narrator is able to look once again at her own family with a larger view of empathy and understanding of the power of loss and the trauma of war.

3. Viewing this story through the lens of economics, what can be learned about post-war Korea from this story?

Money, wealth, and the changing of nature of the narrator’s husband’s stature as a profitable artist give a look into the hardships faced by Koreans after the civil war and growing prosperity of contemporary times. It is through this lens that we can analyze how a nation like South Korea has been able to rebuild after a war and fit into a global sphere of influence. The comparison of city life and the way in which money is made and spent in Seoul is in contrast to the lifestyle and frugality of the innkeeper and her perseverance of tradition and familial ideals but also a past that was not exorbitant and excessive in lifestyle or freedom. The narrator’s payment is crucial for the innkeeper to make her trip to Seoul and serves as one of the motivating forces for the innkeeper.

4. What purpose does the telling of the Grandmother No-No’s story fulfill in the second half of “Winter Outing?”

Grandmother No-No is history present. Grandmother No-No, while a mystery at first, is the embodiment of pain and trauma that comes from the terror of the war and the soldiers invading that eventually led to her son being killed in front of her. What can be seen, as a nervous tic is also that of being trapped in the past, a living reminder and witness to what happened and a human face to history that is less vibrant as time moves forward. For “Winter Outing,” Grandmother No-No has a huge impact on the narrator and her ability to grow in empathy and

understanding of those directly impacted by the civil war, such as her husband, and allows the narrator to return to her life a more loving and understanding person.

5. How can this story be seen as an allegory to the Korean Civil War and its aftermath? How has the war and Korean history influenced this story?

The trauma, despair and separation that haunt this story are that of the Korean Civil War. “Winter Outing” tells this tale through two families and their unique histories. The narrator’s family is separated and takes a broader understanding of history and experience to reunite them. The innkeeper’s family was one killed by accident and circumstance. Looking at the history of occupation, colonization and then political struggle that led up to the Korean War and the tragic aftermath of the establishing of two Koreas make this story gain light in a before and after experience.

6. In what ways is this story one of resilience and recovery? How can this view be challenged?

This is a story of a country torn into two by a horrific war and people haunted by trauma and irrevocable pain. Yet this is a story also of progress, resilience and recovery. This can be seen in the narrator’s own transformation over the course of the story as a person who is able to more fully understand and accept her daughter and husband’s relationship and through the supportive and loving relationship of the innkeeper and her mother-in-law, Grandmother No-No. These relationships show that family, love, and remembrance are part of progress and moving forward and it is through understanding history and acknowledging the past and pain, one is able to move forward. This view can be challenged if seen as how history cannot be escaped and that the trauma of the past is a prison in which one is chained. This can be shown through the incredibly close bond between the husband and daughter and the permanent scar left on Grandmother No-No in her shaking that has left her trapped in a past of trauma and guilt.

Activities

This lesson comes after two to three days of studying the Korean War in class, establishing the causes of the war, the events of the war, a geography study, and the aftermath of the war. Students will go in-depth to develop personal research questions on the war itself and its effect on culture and society and work in small groups to answer and present their findings. “Winter Outing” will be read directly after that.

Day One

1. Assign students to read “Winter Outing” by Pak Wansŏ either for the previous day’s homework, silently in class or read aloud as a group in class
2. After reading, ask students to review the text once more, and continue to text code and annotate by writing questions, comments, and wonderings in the margins in preparation for class discussion. See Appendix A & B
3. For 15 minutes, have students to work in small groups of 3-4 to discuss what they found confusing in the story, questions they had, and how they feel this story relates to the Korean War and its aftermath

4. Lead a whole-class discussion on the elements of the story, character development, and where traces of the Korean War can be found
5. Assign the discussion questions for homework

Day Two

1. Review and collect the discussion questions given by homework
2. Introduce to students that they will now be rewriting the story of “Winter Outing” but from the perspective of a character different than the current narrator. This can be a major character from the story such as the husband, the innkeeper or Grandmother No-No, a minor character such as the daughter or one of the neighbor kids around the inn or can be an invented character
3. Instruct students that the elements of the story- the plot, the characters, the setting, the arc of the story- remain the same and it is their duty to preserve the story as much as possible while looking at the history, circumstances and events from a new perspective
4. Encourage students to complete a mind map or web of their notes and think of how the story may change depending on who is telling the story
5. Remind students that this is a post-war story and the effects of the Korean War should be evident no matter the character they choose. Proof of an understanding of history and the Korean War and its aftermath, as well as an emphasis on authenticity and accuracy will be assessed
6. Allow students to begin working on their stories
7. Assign finishing the stories for homework

Day Three

1. Students are paired with a partner to do a peer review of their stories to check for flow, accuracy to both the storyline of “Winter Outing” and Korean history, and for grammar and English convention errors
2. Students revise work to final draft, publishable forms
3. Students share parts of their work to the class reading excerpts- paragraphs, lines, quotes, or pages- aloud to the class in a collage-style presentation form

Citations

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Appendix A

TEXT CODE PROCEDURES

This is a way to mark what you are reading, or “Text Code” it, in order to be able to go back and find something you have a question about, things that you want to talk about, or what words you need to look up in the dictionary.

Here's What To Do!

When you are reading put a ...

exclamation point (!) on something you find interesting

question mark (?) on something you have a question about or don't understand

Circle

any words you don't know

underline something you want to talk about or think is important

ANNOTATING TEXT PROCEDURES

WHAT to write:

- Explanations
- Questions
- Connections
- Opinions
- Sketches/Diagrams

WHERE to write:

- Write in the empty space around the text
OR
 - Put key numbers or letters by the text and write your notes on a separate page.
-

What this IS:

- Explaining your text codes
- Making notes as you read
- Talking to the text
- Talking to someone else about the text

What this is NOT:

- You do NOT need full sentences
- Do NOT worry about correct English – you CAN write in your own language too.
- Neatness does NOT count as long as you can read it later!
- There is NO right or wrong – all ideas are welcome!